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### AN APOLOGETIC IRENICON.

IN the course of his benevolent disquisition upon those endeavours to defend a cherished cause, which Mr. Harrison terms my controversies, he more than once appeals to me in a manner which demands a response. I hasten to stretch forth my hand for the olive-branch which my courteous opponent holds out; and I assure him of my readiness to "kiss and be friends," at least in that symbolic fashion which is alone possible to male Britons.

Would that this were all that courtesy and respect require of me! But when I look closely into the terms of the treaty of peace offered by the plenipotentiary of latter-day Positivism, I observe that it follows a not uncommon precedent in setting forth claims for compensation; indeed, for cession of territory. Mr. Harrison declares that I have done him grievous wrong; and he justly reckons upon my readiness, the damage being proved, to make the fullest reparation. Further, he more than suggests that the territory I have considered to form part of the general domain of scientific thought belongs to the particular sphere of influence of Positivism—is, in fact, nothing but a sort of *Hinterland* to the settlement founded by Auguste Comte. Nor is this all. Mr. Harrison considers himself, and is most justly held by the world in general to be, an instructor of mankind. If his teachings are misrepresented and the effects of his admirable missionary zeal misappropriated, he has the fullest right to demand rectification and restoration. But, not content with the high functions of a teacher, Mr. Harrison seems disposed to add to them those of a catechist. No doubt there is a close and natural alliance between the two; nor can there be a question as to the propriety of the latter attitude so long as the catechism is addressed to a professed catechumen. I confess to a lingering suspicion whether the privilege of demanding a reply to any questions one chooses to ask extends further—especially, if by stipulating for a "straight-forward" answer, the questioner hints a doubt of the likelihood of getting it. But I am too desirous to meet any other man of peace

more than half-way, to stand upon trifles; and I shall do my best to satisfy all demands, reasonable or otherwise.

First, let me try to mitigate the offence charged against me. My delict appears to consist in the republication, without note or comment, in *Controverted Questions*, of an essay on "Agnosticism" published three years ago, in which I took it for granted that Mr. Harrison was pledged to the essential and fundamental dogmas of that primitive, and now, it appears, archaic, Positivism which was originated, developed, and expounded, with pedantic prolixity and minuteness of detail, by Comte, half a century ago; and which embraces not only a philosophy and a system of politics, but culminates in an elaborate scheme of religious organization, equipped with priesthood, liturgy, and calendar. And, lest anything should be wanting to complete the resemblance to the Papistical model, on which primitive Positivism was expressly founded, the Atheocracy of the new faith was to establish as thorough a spiritual despotism, and to exhibit as complete a contempt for liberty of conscience, as the Theocracy it aimed to supplant.

If we are to accept the explicit and repeated declarations of the founder himself, the corner-stone of the new religion is the "Worship of Humanity." On the title-page of his own summary of his philosophy—a sort of Positivist *Whole Duty of Man*—published in 1848,<sup>1</sup> Comte proclaims that his aim is to re-organise society—

"Sans dieu, ni roi, par le Culte systématique de l'Humanité."

That is to say, the systematic "Worship of Humanity" is the means whereby the end, the regeneration of mankind, is to be attained, just as the systematic worship of the "Son of Man" is the means whereby the Christian Churches propose to reach the same goal. Abolish that worship, and you cut out the heart of Christianity; abolish the Worship of Humanity, and Positivism, as understood by its founder, falls a corpse.

There cannot be the slightest question as to what Comte meant by the "Culte" or "Worship" of Humanity. At page 327 of the *Discours*, the main text of which I have just cited, he tells us that—

"Le culte des positivistes ne s'adresse point, comme celui des théologues, à un être absolu, isolé, incompréhensible, dont l'existence ne comporte aucune démonstration et repousse toute comparaison réelle. Nul mystère ne doit altérer l'évidence spontanée qui caractérise le nouvel Etre-suprême. Il ne sera dignement chanté, aimé, et servi que d'après une suffisante connaissance des diverses lois naturelles qui régissent son existence, la plus compliquée que nous puissions contempler."

And on page 324, this "new Supreme Being," "ce seul véritable Grand-Etre," is defined to be "L'Humanité."

(1) The title of this work is worth study: "Discours sur l'ensemble du Positivisme, ou exposition sommaire de la doctrine philosophique et sociale propre à la grande République Occidentale."

Therefore, when the founder of Positivism uses the word "Culte," he indubitably uses it in the strict theological sense; he sets "Humanity" as the "new Supreme Being" in the place of the Divinity of the theologians; and, quite consistently, he proposes to divert the stream of praise, love, and service, which has hitherto flowed towards the God worshipped by Jew and Christian and Mahommedan, to this hypostatized abstraction; a mere crude metaphysical personification, which, to the profane, is hardly distinguishable from an overgrown fetish.

It is this monstrous religious abortion, with its adoration of an animistic idol, nowise more respectable for being the work of man's brain instead of his hands; with all its baleful consequences of spiritual tyranny and slavish social "organization," which I have done my best, at intervals, during the last quarter of a century, to separate from everything that has a right to the name of scientific thought or of wholesome ethical aspiration; and it would appear that even the epigoni of Comte have, at last, come round to my side.

From this point of view, Mr. Harrison's exposition of his present position is as interesting as, to many, it will be surprising. "I am no Comtist," "I am not bound by Comte's books or by his injunctions," says he. While, as the representative of that which, at the present day, calls itself Positivism, we are informed that he told a meeting of disciples in 1889—

"We do not believe in Auguste Comte."

Thus it would seem that, after forty years' wandering in the "occidental" wilderness, the Law, proclaimed as the be-all and end-all of philosophic insight and religious sentiment, in Horeb on Seine, has been superseded by a Deuteronomy propounded in Moab on Thames. But this historical analogy extends no further; for the authority of the Moses of Positivism is roughly, not to say contemptuously, set aside by its Joshua.

"We do not believe in Auguste Comte," is a sufficiently comprehensive formula; but it is also vague. As Macaulay somewhere says of the sunshade of the Fairy Paribanou, it may be folded up in the hand, or it may be made to cover an army. For my own part, I should be rejoiced to lend a hand in stretching it over the whole of primitive Positivism—philosophy, politics, liturgy, "New Supreme Being," and all. I should, for once, be on the side of the angels, and joy over the repentant, if I were joined by my friend Mr. Harrison under the capacious expanse of the umbrella thus spread out. And, assuredly, the last thing I ever have wished, or can wish, to do is to force upon him responsibility for absurdities he does not accept, and, inferentially, denounces. I offer my humble apologies to Mr. Harrison for not knowing, three years since, that

he had reached the point attained by myself twenty years ago, when a far less vehement and uncompromising expression of similar disbelief brought down upon me the wrath of the chief representative of Positivism in England at that time.

Yet I must not let the glow of our recent embrace carry me too far. A chill of doubt concerning the real extent of our agreement and the proper scope of my apology, falls upon me when I ask myself this question: If Mr. Harrison says, "We do not believe in Auguste Comte" (whose chief, if not only, claim to originality is the promulgation of the "Worship of Humanity"), in the sense which I attach to those words, what can be his motive for propounding a hitherto unheard-of interpretation for Comte's term "Culte"? He says it "does not mean worship, but only regard for." I am so sure that Mr. Harrison is a vastly better French scholar than I am, that, if I stood alone in the belief that "culte," in this connection, means exactly what, in English, is signified by "worship and adoration," I should have dismissed from my mind the thought that first flitted through it, that this exegesis savours more of Stratford-atte-Bowe than of Paris. But I do not stand alone. For example, Bossuet, who the French of Paris certainly did "yknowe," in a very well-known passage<sup>1</sup> writes: "Le culte des morts faisoit presque tout le fond de l'idolatrie." Now, if I render "culte" by "regard for," it seems to me I make nonsense of the great prelate's notable assertion. Still more fatal is the effect of such construing on the passage from Comte's *Discours* quoted above. Surely, the person who carries his "regard for" an object so far as to "praise, love, and serve" it, has not much left to do if he sets about to worship it. And to come down to our own time, if I see a reference to "M. le Ministre des Cultes" in the *Débats* or the *Temps*, ought I to English the words "The Minister of Regards for"? Fain would I abstain from hazarding the breaking off of negotiations and a fresh appeal to arms. It is in the most brotherly spirit that I suggest that the attempt to render "culte," in "Culte de l'Humanité," by anything but "worship" or "religion" really will not do. And, therefore, since Mr. Harrison is the last person in the world to have recourse, consciously and wilfully, to exegetic evasion, I ask myself, once more, what strong influence has, for the moment, obscured the native clearness of his linguistic sense?

May I venture to suggest that it is that natural desire for apparent, if not real, continuity and consistency which is so strong a passion of the human breast? In truth, that has happened to Positivism, which during the last two thousand years has happened to some other

(1) Quoted, by the way, in *Controverted Questions*, and in an essay which Mr. Harrison is good enough to praise.

projects for the regeneration of mankind. Great historical fortunes have awaited other religious systems which, by the time they have passed into the hands of the third generation of the faithful, have executed a *volte-face* and rejected some of the cardinal teachings of their founder, while retaining the name adopted by their predecessors. And it is a characteristic of the process, that these metamorphosed disciples are more angry with those who agree with them in practically throwing their founder overboard, than with any other kind of heretic; most angry, perhaps, with those who point out to them that they really have no right to retain the use of a name, the proper and primitive significance of which they utterly repudiate. What would the self-constituted pontiff of archaic Positivism, supposing he could return to this lower (or perhaps upper) world, have to say to people who contumeliously refuse to have anything to do with the very principle of the machinery for regenerating mankind, which he so carefully patented; and yet persist in calling themselves by the name he had invented for the sole use of the assignees and workers of that machinery? Poor M. Comte; conceive the shock to his ghost, on visiting the Mecca of Neo-Positivism, to find that kaaba and suspended coffin had been handed over to the contractor for dust; while disbelief in the prophet was raised to the dignity of a chief article of the new "regard for" humanity.

So much, by way of explanation and apology, as may properly precede the expression of my sincere wish that it were possible for me to go hand in hand with Mr. Harrison henceforward. I do not see why there should be any impassable gulf between us, now that the "*Culte de l'Humanité*" is whittled down to "regard for" one's fellow-creatures; to the hearty acknowledgment of that duty towards one's neighbour, which was instilled into my mind, by quite another sort of catechist, in my childhood; to the injunction to love one's fellow-men, as far as they are lovely and even a good deal beyond that point; to serve them as well as they will let one. But I must make two stipulations. The one, that our walking together implies that Mr. Harrison shall keep his Positivist flag in his pocket. I refuse to come under a banner, the very objectionable original colours of which will never, I fear, wash out. The other, that the natural and proper reaction of the new Positivism against its founder keeps within the limits laid down by strict justice, if not within those assigned by gratitude.

There is, for me, a point beyond which Paribanou's umbrella may not throw its shade. In fact, I stand where I stood so long since, when I wrote that I should be sorry to—

"lead anyone to suppose that I think M. Comte's works worthless; or that I do not heartily respect and sympathise with those who have been impelled by him to think deeply upon social problems and to strive nobly for social regenera-



tion. It is the virtue of that impulse which will, I believe, save the name and fame of Auguste Comte from oblivion."

I do not see my way to the recantation of this opinion. I may be wrong, but it seems to me a good deal more respectful than the blunt and unqualified declaration, "We do not believe in Auguste Comte," of the new Positivism. No doubt, Mr. Harrison, in the course of his conscientious study of what I have written about M. Comte, has met with this passage; and, therefore, when he tells his readers that I have such a blind "antipathy" to M. Comte that the mere sight of his name afflicts me with saltatory mania, I can only imagine that the exegetical eccentricity I have already had occasion to deplore, affects his perception of the proper meaning of English, no less than of French words.

I suppose I must say something about the personal question which Mr. Harrison has raised. Doubtless I ought to have known what he said to the Positivists of New York in 1885.

"We do not ask a convinced Positivist to accept all that may be found in Comte's writings."

But I really do not see what difference it would have made. Mr. Harrison himself might have been ready to do what he would not require other people to do; just as liberal theologians, who perhaps have signed and still hold by the Thirty-nine Articles, yet are ready to accept a very great reduction, as the price of Christian fellowship, from any one else. I submit, there is a very long cry from—We do not accept "all that may be found in Comte's writings," to "We do not believe in Auguste Comte."

Again, it is quite true that, in 1889, some months after the appearance of "Agnosticism," Mr. Harrison spoke to me privately and told me that I had mistaken his attitude towards Comte's Positivism; and that I was glad to recognise that we were not so far apart after all. That is perfectly correct; and I have no doubt that Mr. Harrison will likewise remember, as distinctly as I do, the additional circumstance, that he expressed an intention of defining his position; and that he did not refer me to any publication in which it had been already defined. Rightly or wrongly, the impression left upon my mind by our conversation was, that Mr. Harrison would speedily deal with my reply to his onslaught upon Agnosticism in general (which, in my simplicity, I had imagined, though it appears that this was a mere piece of vanity on my part, was largely meant for me in particular), and that he would put the general public, whom he had specifically addressed in that essay, in possession of his real views. Month after month I looked, with interest a little mixed with anxiety, for the new profession of faith, if indeed I should not say, the profession of the new faith; but in vain *expectans expectavi*; and, when I republished "Agnosticism," my very strong

and, I think, well-founded, dislike to refer to private communications in public discussion would have sufficed to ensure my silence, even if the still more efficient guarantee of not knowing exactly what to say had been absent.

And really, after all this discussion, I still do not exactly know what to say. It seems to me that Mr. Harrison is desirous of keeping the shadow, while throwing away the substance of primitive Positivism. He would like to get rid of the "Worship of Humanity," and yet retain the name of "culte," or worship, for those "regards for" their fellow-men which are not exactly the private property of Positivists. He seems, once more, to want to persuade us that agnosticism is only the Court of the Gentiles of the Positivist temple; and that those who profess ignorance about the proper solution of certain speculative problems ought to call themselves Positivists of the Gate, if it happens that they also take a lively interest in social and political questions.

In all this I cannot follow him; indeed, it is such a danger to peace that I could wish he would leave off the iteration of this opinion. Whether dogs ought to bite dogs or not—and, *pace* our genial friend, Sir James Stephen, I think any decent collie is bound to bite all those runners and worryers of sheep who confuse the flock and drive it into all sorts of morasses and thickets—it is clear to me that error is error, whether in friend or foe, and deserves no quarter in whatever camp it may be found.

I must respectfully, but steadfastly, decline to give any one who cares for my opinion the slightest excuse for supposing that I can give my assent to a single doctrine which is the peculiar property of Positivism, old or new. I prefer frank Atheism to the acknowledgment, in any shape or way, of a human "Grand Etre suprême." I really do not care one straw for "subjective immortality," nor desire any place in the minds of coming generations, beyond that which may be kept warm for me by those whom I love and who love me. Most strongly do I object to have anything to do with the attempt to persuade simple people that the position of a pallid shadow in the Hades of futurity is, in any sense, an equivalent for the vivid and palpitating individual deathlessness of old and new theological faiths. I would rather have four-and-twenty hours of a healthy day-labourer's existence than four-and-twenty centuries' remembrance, at odd intervals of the occupations of posterity. If I recollect rightly, Achilles was much of my way of thinking. And I utterly reject every description of complicity with the political vagaries preached, either formerly or now, in the name of Positivism. I profess myself the most *débonnaire* of dogs; but I have been trained to follow at the heel of true science, and I cannot undertake not to bark, perhaps even to bite, whenever I observe that some one, who

is not my mistress, is assuming her authority, or trying to wheedle me from her side.

Thus, I lament to say, the prospects of an enduring peace seem still precarious. But I am so anxious to show my good will, so desirous of removing every possible cause of present or future offence, that I must entreat Mr. Harrison to dismiss from his mind the notion which seems to occupy a large place in it, that I am, in some way or other, a rival, or competitor, in that business of instructing the human race, or, at least, the occidental part of it, which he and his friends so energetically carry on in Newton Hall and elsewhere. I aspire to no such elevated and difficult situation. I declare myself not only undesirous of it, but deeply conscious of a constitutional unfitness for it. Age and hygienic necessities bind me to a somewhat anchoritic life in pure air, with abundant leisure to meditate upon the wisdom of *Candide's* sage aphorism, "*Cultivons notre jardin*"—especially if the term "garden" may be taken broadly and applied to the stony and weed-grown ground within my skull, as well as to a few perches of more promising chalk down outside it. In addition to these effectual bars to any of the ambitious pretensions ascribed to me, there is another: of all possible positions that of master of a school, or leader of a sect, or chief of a party, appears to me to be the most undesirable; in fact, the average British matron cannot look upon followers with a more evil eye than I do. Such acquaintance with the history of thought as I possess, has taught me to regard schools, parties, and sects as arrangements, the usual effect of which is to perpetuate all that is worst and feeblest in the master's, leader's, or founder's work; or else, as in some cases, to upset it altogether; as a sort of hydrants for extinguishing the fire of genius and for stifling the flame of high aspirations, the kindling of which has been the chief, perhaps the only, merit of the protagonist of the movement. I always have been, am, and propose to remain, a mere scholar. All that I have ever proposed to myself is to say, This and this have I learned; thus and thus have I learned it: go thou and learn better; but do not thrust on my shoulders the responsibility for your own laziness if you elect to take, on my authority, conclusions, the value of which you ought to have tested for yourself.

It is true that, from time to time, the necessity of saying some of the lessons I have learned, in public, has been laid upon me by circumstances quite beyond my control. I regret to have to add that, as a general rule, I have reaped little beyond discredit from these recitations. Our great examiner-general, the British critic, has usually relegated me to the bottom of the class, among infidels, materialists, sceptics, and other naughty dunces; while some, I regret to say, have even carried misrepresentation so far as to count me among the devotees of a "culte" in which, with all respect for Mr.



Harrison's desire for comprehension, I cannot permit myself to be regarded even as a neophyte.

As to the substance of these public exercises, I must admit that it is quite correct to say that they have been largely composed of painful efforts to show that many of the lessons I had repeated in early life, without a moment's doubt that they were all compact of divine truth, are, in fact, made up either of obvious fictions or of baseless assumptions. But it appears to me that the statement that they are all of this negative character; and, more especially, that the great problems of human life have been entirely left out of my purview, is one to which I must demur. It can by no means be sustained.

Cuvier's aphorism, prefixed to the Prologue of *Controverted Questions*, that "one should clear the ground before beginning to build," not only, as I think, commends itself to common sense, but it exactly suggests the positive, no less than the negative, side of a purpose I have had in view for the last thirty years. It is Goethe's maxim about "Thätige Skepsis" in another shape; and it will be observed that it enjoins the clearing of the ground, not in a spirit of wanton mischief, not for destruction's sake, but with the distinct purpose of fitting the site for those constructive operations which must be the ultimate object of every rational man. Neither one lifetime, nor two, nor half a dozen, will suffice to clear away the astonishing tangle of inherited mythology; of carefully maintained ignorance, that hugs itself under the name of reverence; of discreditable prejudice; no less than of creditable affection for old ideals, and of rational alarm lest the wheat should be torn up by the roots along with the tares. There is endless backwoodsman's work yet to be done. If "those also serve who only stand and wait," still more do those who sweep and cleanse; and if any man elect to give his strength to the weeder's and scavenger's occupation, I remain of the opinion that his service should be counted acceptable, and that no one has a right to ask more of him than faithful performance of the duties he has undertaken. I venture to count it an improbable suggestion that any such person—a man, let us say, who has well-nigh reached his threescore years and ten and has graduated in all the faculties of human relationships; who has taken his share in all the deep joys and deeper anxieties which cling about them; who has felt the burden of young lives entrusted to his care, and has stood alone with his dead before the abyss of the eternal—has never had a thought beyond negative criticism. It seems to me incredible that such an one can have done his day's work, always with a light heart, with no sense of responsibility, no terror of that which may appear when the factitious veil of Isis—the thick web of fiction man has woven round nature—is stripped off.

I am aware that the world which calls itself "religious" commonly

assumes that it has a monopoly of serious thought; I think it is to be regretted that such presumption should not be confined to it.

But this is not the only flavour of the pulpit which is perceptible in Mr. Harrison's comments.

"Here is a portly octavo volume of 625 pages, almost the whole of which is occupied with the Agnostic view concerning the Scriptures, Church doctrines, miracles, and theology. Throughout it we cannot find any distinct and positive assurance as to a moral Providence, as to the will or nature of any supreme Power or Force, as to the state of man or any part of man after death, as to the nature of sin, or as to any punishment or reward beyond those of this life. Yet these are the grand and perennial questions which the thinking world to-day is asking, and which Mr. Huxley's clerical antagonists profess to answer."

Whereupon my positivist antagonist ranges himself beside his clerical analogues, puts the same questions, and insinuates, if he does not distinctly profess, the same ability to answer them.<sup>1</sup>

"1. Has Mr. Huxley himself any mental bias, *pro* or *con*, with reference, let us say, to Creation, Providence, Immortality, and Future Punishment—and, if any, what?"

"2. Does he think it of no consequence to human life or to society, whether people have any formed opinion on these problems or not? Are the questions themselves idle and trivial from the point of view of morality and civilisation?"

"3. Does he think that mankind will cease to ask these questions, simply by being told that Mr. Huxley and other men of science can give no answer?" (p. 425).

I reply to these questions, in order, as follows:—

1. I have no doubt whatever that I am burdened with various kinds of "mental bias," of some of which I am conscious, while for the knowledge of another and more dangerous set I must look to those useful persons, candid friends. But I am of opinion that it is of the essence of scientific method to check and, if possible, to suppress each and every bias touching the subject of an inquiry; and that no good purpose can be served by making a, probably, very imperfect catalogue of my own temptations to error.

With respect to "Creation," I fancy the question has been answered by me with sufficient directness to satisfy even the requirements of my catechist, over and over again. I should have thought it

(1) "No reader of mine, I hope, will fall into the trap of imagining that Positivists have no more to say on these questions than Agnostics, for that would be an entire misconception" (p. 425). Yet on pp. 420, 421, after referring to such questions as the *Origin of the universe, Providence, the Nature and Immortality of the soul*, and stating that "upon these high questions 'The Agnostic' simply suspends his judgment"; Mr. Harrison adds, that this "is the attitude uniformly insisted on by myself and my colleagues, for it is simply one side of the medal of Positivism itself." It would appear, therefore, that the "more to say on these questions," presumably inscribed on the other side of the medal of Positivism, can only be the algebraic symbol of some prodigious negative quantity. Who is to disentangle Mr. Harrison's "straightforward" opinion from these contradictory propositions?

impossible for any one who has done me the honour to cast even a superficial glance through my writings to consider it needful to ask such a question. So far back as 1860 I wrote :—

“The doctrine of special creation owes its existence very largely to the supposed necessity for making science accord with the Hebrew cosmogony;”

and that the hypothesis of special creation is, in my judgment, a “mere specious mask for our ignorance.” Not content with negation, I said :—

“Harmonious order governing eternally continuous progress—the web and woof of matter and force interweaving by slow degrees, without a broken thread, that veil which lies between us and the infinite—that universe which alone we know or can know; such is the picture which science draws of the world.”

It is thirty-two years since these passages were written; twenty-two since they appeared under my name in *Lay Sermons*. Every reader of Goethe will know that the second is little more than a paraphrase of the well-known utterance of the “Zeitgeist” in *Faust*, which surely is something more than a mere negation of the clumsy anthropomorphism of special creation.

Follows a query about “Providence,” my answer to which must depend upon what my questioner means by that substantive, whether alone, or qualified by the adjective “moral.”

If the doctrine of a Providence is to be taken as the expression, in a way “to be understood of the people,” of the total exclusion of chance from a place even in the most insignificant corner of Nature; if it means the strong conviction that the cosmic process is rational; and the faith that, throughout all duration, unbroken order has reigned in the universe—I not only accept it, but I am disposed to think it the most important of all truths. As it is of more consequence for a citizen to know the law than to be personally acquainted with the features of those who will surely carry it into effect, so this very positive doctrine of Providence, in the sense defined, seems to me far more important than all the theorems of speculative theology. If, further, the doctrine is held to imply that, in some indefinitely remote past æon, the cosmic process was set going by some entity possessed of intelligence and foresight, similar to our own in kind, however superior in degree; if, consequently, it is held that every event, not merely in our planetary speck, but in untold millions of other worlds, was foreknown before these worlds were, scientific thought, so far as I know anything about it, has nothing to say against that hypothesis. It is in fact an anthropomorphic rendering of the doctrine of evolution.

It may be so, but the evidence accessible to us is, to my mind, wholly insufficient to warrant either a positive or a negative conclu-

sion. To avoid misunderstanding, it seems proper to add that this conception of a not merely general, but universal and all-pervading "Providence" appears to me to be wholly incompatible with the notion of "special Providences," which is all that the mass of men really care about. If such an occurrence as that somebody has just fallen overboard from the boat I see out of my window and is being rescued from destruction by what people call a "miracle"—if all that was purposely arranged, say, only ten years ago, would not such "special providential intervention" seem grievously like the public performance of a little drama which had long since been carefully rehearsed? Would the manager have a reasonable claim on the gratitude of the person whom he had nearly drowned in the course of "providentially" saving him?

I am asked for a distinct and positive assurance as to a moral providence. I envy the light heart with which my interrogator seems to put questions which bristle with difficulties to any one who desires to have a clear conception of their scope. "Providence," in the sense of the rational order of the universe (or, if the phrase be preferred, the cause of that order), is undoubtedly as responsible for the phenomena of human existence as for any others. So far as mankind has acquired the conviction that the observance of certain rules of conduct is essential to the maintenance of social existence, it may be proper to say that "Providence," operating through men, has generated morality. Within the limits of a fraction of a fraction of the living world, therefore, there is a "moral" providence. Through this small plot of an infinitesimal fragment of the universe there runs a "stream of tendency towards righteousness." But outside the very rudimentary germ of a garden of Eden, thus watered, I am unable to discover any "moral" purpose; or anything but a stream of tendency towards the consummation of the cosmic process, chiefly by means of the struggle for existence, which is no more righteous or unrighteous than the operation of any other mechanism.

I hear much of the "ethics of evolution." I apprehend that, in the broadest sense of the term "evolution," there neither is, nor can be, any such thing. The notion that the doctrine of evolution can furnish a foundation for morals seems to me to be an illusion, which has arisen from the unfortunate ambiguity of the term "fittest" in the formula, "survival of the fittest." We commonly use "fittest" in a good sense, with an understood connotation of "best;" and "best" we are apt to take in its ethical sense. But the "fittest" which survives in the struggle for existence may be, and often is, the ethically worst.

So far as I am able to interpret the evidence which bears upon the evolution of man as it now stands, there was a stage in that process

when, if I may speak figuratively, the "Welt-geist" repented him that he had made mankind no better than the brutes, and resolved upon a largely new departure. Up to that time, the struggle for existence had dominated the way of life of the human, as of the other, higher brutes; since that time, men have been impelled, with gentle but steady pressure, to help one another, instead of treading one another mercilessly under foot; to restrain their lusts, instead of seeking, with all their strength and cunning, to gratify them; to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the ordered commonwealth, through which alone the ethical ideal of manhood can be attained, instead of exploiting social existence for their individual ends. Since that time, as the price of the high distinction of his changed destiny, man has lost the happy singleness of aim of the brute; and, from cradle to grave, that which he would not he does, because the cosmic process carries him away; and that which he would he does not, because the ethical stream of tendency is still but a rill.

It is the secret of the superiority of the best theological teachers to the majority of their opponents, that they substantially recognise these realities of things, however strange the forms in which they clothe their conceptions. The doctrines of predestination; of original sin; of the innate depravity of man and the evil fate of the greater part of the race; of the primacy of Satan in this world; of the essential vileness of matter; of a malevolent Demiurgus subordinate to a benevolent Almighty, who has only lately revealed himself, faulty as they are, appear to me to be vastly nearer the truth than the "liberal" popular illusions that babies are all born good and that the example of a corrupt society is responsible for their failure to remain so; that it is given to everybody to reach the ethical ideal if he will only try; that all partial evil is universal good; and other optimistic figments, such as that which represents "Providence" under the guise of a paternal philanthropist, and bids us believe that everything will come right (according to our notions) at last. I thought I had substantially said all this in my "Prologue"; but if a reader of Mr. Harrison's acumen and carefulness has been unable to discover it, I may be forgiven for the repetition.

As to "Immortality" again. It would be presumption on my part to consider my querist bound to know anything of my writing beyond the book which he has selected for criticism; but I may mention that, about a dozen years ago, I published a little work concerning David Hume, in which he will find all I have to say on that topic. I do not think I need return to "subjective" immortality; but it may be well to add that I am a very strong believer in the punishment of certain kinds of actions, not only in the present, but in all the future a man can have, be it long or



short. Therefore in hell; for I suppose that all men with a clear sense of right and wrong (and I am not sure that any others deserve such punishment) have now and then "descended into hell" and stopped there, quite long enough to know what infinite punishment means. And if a genuine, not merely subjective, immortality awaits us, I conceive that, without some such change as that depicted in the fifteenth chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians, immortality must be eternal misery. The fate of Swift's Struldbrugs seems to me not more horrible than that of a mind imprisoned for ever within the *flammanitia mænia* of inextinguishable memories.

Further, it may be well to remember that the highest level of moral aspiration recorded in history, was reached by a few ancient Jews, Micah, Isaiah, and the rest, who took no count whatever of what might, or might not, happen to them after death. It is not obvious to me why the same point should not, by-and-by, be reached by the Gentiles.

2. I have already expressed the opinion that such an inquiry as this belongs to the category of questions which thoughtful men neither put nor answer.

3. Mr. Harrison does not seem to have paid much attention to the framing of this article. I cannot admit that mankind are told by me that his questions are unanswerable, when I have just shown that I have long since tried to answer the majority of them. What I suppose Mr. Harrison means is that my answers will not satisfy the generality of mankind; that they will not be content to be told that there are some topics about which we know nothing now, and do not seem likely ever to be able to know more; and, consequently, that, as he says, "in the long run the world will turn to those who have conclusions." It seems to me highly probable that they will do so. The last sentence meets with my complete assent, if I may make a small alteration, and interpolate "profess to" between its penultimate and antepenultimate words. And that is the pity of it. As in the past, so, I fear, through a very long future, the multitude will continue to turn to those who are ready to feed it with the viands its soul lusteth after; who will offer mental peace where there is no peace; and lap it in the luxury of pleasant delusions.

To missionaries of the Neo-Positivist, as to those of other professed solutions of insoluble mysteries, whose souls are bound up in the success of their sectarian propaganda, no doubt, it must be very disheartening if the "world," for whose assent and approbation they sue, stops its ears and turns its back upon them. But what does it signify to any one who does not happen to be a missionary of any sect, philosophical or religious;<sup>1</sup> and who, if he were,

(1) In the teeth of my reiterated declarations to the contrary, and of the facts of the

would have no sermon to preach except from the text with which Descartes, to go no further back, furnished us two centuries since? I am very sorry if people will not listen to those who rehearse before them the best lessons they have been able to learn; but that is their business, not mine. Belief in majorities is not rooted in my breast; and, if all the world were against me, the fact might warn me to revise and criticise my opinions, but would not, in itself, supply a ghost of a reason for forsaking them. For myself, I say deliberately: It is better to have a millstone tied round the neck and be thrown into the sea, than to share the enterprises of those to whom the world has turned, and will turn, because they minister to its weaknesses and cover up the awful realities which it shudders to look at.

T. H. HUXLEY.

case, Mr. Harrison says of me (p. 425): "He is . . . the founder, as he claims, of 'Agnosticism.'" Let me repeat, once more, that while I undoubtedly am responsible for the names Agnostic and Agnosticism, I have been careful, from the first, to declare that I learned the doctrine, as I understand it, from Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Hamilton. I am not aware that any one has made the slightest addition of value to the teachings of these men, as I received them forty years ago. Certainly, I have never pretended to do so.